

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 08796 160738Z
ACTION EA-12

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R 160617Z DEC 7
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2000
INFO AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 8796

FOR EA/ANP, EA/RA, S/IL, S/P, AND INR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, AS
SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS

REF: MELBOURNE 2530

1. LEST READERS BE MISLED BY THE CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE
ELECTION STATISTICS CONTAINED IN REFTEL (A COMMENT ON
THE ELECTION RESULTS PREPARED BY LABOR ATTACHE ARTHUR W.
PURCELL), EMBASSY WISHES TO POINT OUT THE FOLLOWING:

2. IT IS AN ERROR TO LUMP AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRAT VOTES
(9.4 PERCENT) WITH ALP VOTES. THE AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS
ARE A THIRD PARTY COMPOSED OF DISAFFECTED LIBERAL, LABOR
AND INDEPENDENT VOTERS. THEY ARE BY NO MEANS ALL LABOR
SYMPATHISERS. IT APPEARS, FROM PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS
OF VOTING RESULTS, THAT A MAJORITY OF AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRATS' "SECOND PREFERENCES" (I.E., WHERE THEIR VOTES
GO IF THEY CAN'T BE COUNTED FOR AD CANDIDATES THEMSELVES)
WERE CAST IN FAVOR OF THE LIBERAL/NCP COALITION.
(OFFICIAL ELECTION STATISTICS SHOWING DIVISION OF PRE-
FERENCES WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE FOR SOME TIME YET.)

3. IT IS AN ERROR TO SEPARATE THE LIBERAL VOTE (38.3
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PERCENT) FROM THE NCP VOTE (9.7 PERCENT) AS A SIGN OF
VOTER DISAFFECTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT, BECAUSE BOTH
HISTORICALLY AS WELL AS IN THE PRESENT THE TWO PARTIES
OPERATE AS A COALITION WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR
GOVERNMENT. THE FACT THAT IN SOME DISTRICTS BOTH PARTIES
PUT UP CANDIDATES DOES NOT DETRACT FROM THIS. THE

LIBERALS HAVE FORMED COALITION GOVERNMENTS WITH THE NCP
IN THE PAST EVEN WHERE THE LIBERALS HAD ABSOLUTE MAJORITIES,
AND THUS NO NEED FOR NCP VOTES.

4. VIRTUALLY EVERY POLITICAL RESEARCH OUTFIT AND POLITICAL
ANALYST WITH WHICH EMBASSY HAS TALKED AGREES THAT IN THE
AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL SCENE THERE ARE TWO HARD-CORE
GROUPS OF APPROXIMATELY 40 PERCENT EACH FOR THE ALP AND
FOR THE L/NCP COALITION. GARY MORGAN, OF THE MORGAN-
GALLUP POLL, BELIEVES THAT FOR HISTORICAL AND SOCIO/
PSYCHO/ECONOMICAL REASONS IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE (SHORT
OF A MAJOR, CATAclysmic POLITICAL DISASTER) FOR EITHER
LABOR OR THE L/NCP TO GET LESS THAN 40 PERCENT OF THE
VOTE. OF THE REMAINING 20 PERCENT, POLLSTERS AND PUNDITS
ALIKE PREDICTED IN THIS LAST ELECTION THAT THE AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRATS (A RELATIVELY NEW POLITICAL GROUPING) WOULD
GET ABOUT 10 PERCENT (THEY ACTUALLY GOT 9.4 PERCENT)
AND THE REMAINDER WERE THE "UNCOMMITTED" SWING VOTE.

5. AND IN THE ELECTION ITSELF, THE ALP GOT ONLY 40.1
PERCENT OF THE VOTE -- ONLY ONE-TENTH OF ONE PERCENT ABOVE
WHAT THE PROFESSIONAL POLITICAL ANALYSTS CALCULATED ITS
BEDROCK BOTTOM POSITION TO BE. THAT IS TO SAY THEY LOST
ALL BUT ALL THE INDEPENDENTS, AND ALL THE "SWING" VOTERS.
MEASURED AGAINST THIS ANALYSIS, THE ALP COULD THEORETICALLY
HAVE RUN THE DISCREDITED LIBERAL TREASURER, PHILIP LYNCH,
AS ITS CANDIDATE AND GOTTEN ABOUT THE SAME PERCENTAGE
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VOTE -- 40 PERCENT. INsofar AS WE CAN DETERMINE, MR.
PURCELL IS THE ONLY PERSON IN AUSTRALIA WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE
THE ALP WAS "DECIMATED" AT THE LAST ELECTION.

6. EMBASSY STANDS BY ITS ELECTION ANALYSES. ALSTON

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

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